

Sent by email: caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk

26 May 2021

Dear Caroline

As you will be aware, the NHS and care services nationally have faced intense pressure in the last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Communities, families, businesses, education and people of all ages have been affected in different ways and the sense of loss, anxiety and hardship so many have sadly experienced during this pandemic is significant and will take time to heal.

The children and young people across our region have been impacted by their own struggles with social isolation and the sudden removal of a great number of safety nets in their school and social environment. In addition, whether in families or living with carers, children and young people may have seen the adults in their lives struggle and have lived in some way with the results of this. We are seeing an increase in the number of referrals to specialist mental health services, which reflects the picture right across the country. In Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) we have seen a significant increase in need compared to previous years which, as you are aware, is having a large adverse impact on waiting times for initial assessments and treatment.

Due to these waiting times you may see, or have seen an increase in letters from your constituents, who are concerned and frustrated by these delays for support. Please be assured that we are doing everything we can to prioritise and manage this demand and ensure that help is offered in a timely way to those that most need it. Staff have worked in adapted ways throughout the pandemic, however, the demand for services has meant that we have had to prioritise our response to those most at risk, but that does not diminish the experience of those children, young people and families who are still waiting.

We know that waiting is very difficult and we would welcome your support wherever appropriate, in communicating to your constituents that we are aware of the challenges of waiting for appointments is placing on them and that we are redesigning our services to respond more effectively to the increase in need. We are increasing capacity for services that deliver prevention and early intervention so that children and young people's needs are met before requiring more specialist support.

The recent Government announcement of £6.3 million investment in CAMHS services in Sussex over the next year will create an additional 100 posts. We are working closely with our partners to identify how we will use this money to expand and improve our current services. Initiatives will include the following:

Mental Health Support Teams in Schools (MHST): MHSTs are intended to provide early intervention for some mental health and emotional wellbeing issues, such as mild to moderate anxiety, as well as helping staff within a school or college setting to provide a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing. The teams will act as a link with local children and young people's mental health services and be supervised by NHS staff. We have been allocated £2,208,000 to increase the number of our MHSTs in schools from six teams to 17 over the next three years which will significantly increase our coverage by September 2023.

Eating Disorders: In recognition of the significant increase in need, we are investing a total £586,000 over the next year. This investment will increase the number of young people we see, including providing support to those children and young people on paediatric wards, those who need additional support at home, as well as treating more young people in the community. It is anticipated that this planned increase in capacity will enable us to further reduce the waiting time and achieve the national standard of 95 percent of children and young people seen within one week of urgent referral by October 2021 and four weeks for a routine appointment by January 2022.

Urgent and Emergency Response: An investment of £679,000 will increase the capacity to provide timely assessments when young people come to A and E. It will also enable more intensive treatment at home for those most unwell in order to reduce risk and prevent further need to attend A and E in crisis.

Increase Capacity to Improve Capacity and Waiting Times: An additional investment of £1,215,000 for this financial year to provide more capacity for Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and autism assessments as well as evidence-based mental health interventions. The increase in capacity will enable children and young people to be seen sooner, accessing more timely support for their emotional health and wellbeing.

We recognise that the additional central investment is a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that young people are able to access the care and support they need. We are fully committed to using this opportunity to its full potential. However, we need to first, as a priority, stabilise our current services and make sure we increase the number of staff to meet the immediate acute demand.

In addition to the specific initiatives mentioned above, we are focusing on other key areas:

- We are working with our NHS and independent partners across the South East to continue to improve the way specialist services for children and young people are commissioned and provided.

- Within Sussex, the recommendations of an independent review of emotional health and wellbeing services for children and young people are being implemented. As a result of the Foundations for Our Future review, published in Summer 2020, a multi-agency oversight board has been established in order to make tangible changes to services to improve access to care and support.
- We are working with Public Health colleagues in Sussex to develop a campaign, targeted at children and young people, to share messages about emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- We continue to work with our partners to identify alternative support options for children and young people, provided by other agencies and organisations, and help our partners identify when these services are more appropriate than specialist CAMHS treatment.

Advice and Information for your constituents

We have a dedicated website for our CAMHS services which has a range of self-help tools and information for young people, parents, and professionals: www.sussexcamhs.nhs.uk. There are also a number of other charities and organisations that can provide specific young person focused support, such as www.youngminds.org.uk, www.e-wellbeing.co.uk and www.place2be.org.uk.

If you are contacted by any constituents please feel free to relay information within this letter to them. We also have a structured Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and would encourage anyone who is unhappy with the service they have received or been offered to raise any issues via this process so it can be recorded and dealt with promptly and effectively. More information can be found here: www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/pals.

Please be assured we are doing all we can to support children, young people and their families. We are working to respond to the unprecedented need as a priority, using the breadth of skills, experience and commitment from our own teams and those of our partners. Please don't hesitate to contact me to arrange a discussion about the challenges we face and the actions we are taking to address them.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Allen
Chief Executive Officer